



# Chocolate Master

When Tim Clark says he lives and breathes chocolate, it's not simply another chocoholic's boast; rather he's talking shop. Mary Riekert talks to Australia's own Chocolate Master.

**A**s breakfast revellers toasted the dawn on Melbourne Cup Day, Australia's very own Chocolate Master touched down at Melbourne Airport, jet lagged but elated after competing in the 2005 World Chocolate Masters Competition in France.

Sculpting a surreal sphere from 15 kilograms of dark, white and milk chocolate, 27-year-old Tim Clark, executive pastry chef at Melbourne's Crown Casino, earned seventh place in the world's toughest chocolate competition. Clark competed against the ticking clock and 16 other professionals from around the world at the Salon du Chocolat and Ecole Lenotre in Paris on October 21 and 22. While Belgium's Pol Deschepper took the title, Clark was happy with his ranking and said he was thrilled to be representing Australia in "an experience of a lifetime".

"When I left for France I felt I would be happy to place in the top 10. To come seventh was just so exciting and I was really happy with that. Throughout the four-day competition I felt quite confident, although I had just one day when I had a few minor mishaps and not everything went quite my way," he said.

Clark had been in training for the competition since December last year and in February he won the Australian Chocolate Masters title. "I pushed myself like I had never done before and it really paid off this time," he said. The competition was hosted by Barry Callebaut, the world's leading supplier of high-quality cocoa and chocolate. An international jury of 16 chocolate professionals judged the finalists and their creations. Competitors had to produce a chocolate pastry, two different chocolate pralines, a chocolate dessert, a small chocolate artwork and an impressive chocolate showpiece, all based on the competition theme of surrealism.

Clark said many of the top European chefs were starting to sit up and take notice of Australian cooking. "In the past there was an attitude of 'What can an Aussie bring to Europe and teach us?' but that is changing now," he said. Very much an Aussie boy, Clark grew up in Wollongong, south of Sydney, and completed an apprenticeship as a pastry chef before leaving Australia to work in a Michelin-star restaurant in Germany. This was followed by a stint on a cruise ship, which allowed him to travel the world and work with top chefs. Clark knew that bringing a little bit of Down Under innovation to the European competition could make a

difference and so flavoured one of his pralines with mountain pepper grown in Australia. "This is grown in the middle of lavender fields, so it has the scent of lavender as well. It is very unusual and, while it may be a little too way out for the average restaurant customer in Australia, it worked for my competition pralines. Also, for the dessert I teamed a rich chocolate cake with a beetroot sorbet flavoured with cassis (blackberry liqueur)," he said.

At school Clark discovered he had a flair for the visual arts and his apprenticeship as a pastry chef gave him an outlet for this gift. Honing his talents for 10 years culminated in the creation of a surreal showpiece for the competition. "I made a chocolate sphere with an eyeball protruding from it. Then there was a fish leaping out of the eye and then a horse leaping out of the fish's mouth. The horse was hollow, with holes in its sides, and out of the holes there were branches and leaves growing. The tail of the fish was transformed into a butterfly," he said. In this section of the competition Clark was ranked fourth in the world.

"I practised making this six times in Australia before leaving for the competition and so felt pretty confident about re-creating it," he said. All competition showpieces stay on display to the public in Paris for a week and then are destroyed due to health regulations.

While in Europe, Clark took the opportunity to visit the Callebaut factory in Belgium. "They ship tonnes of couverture chocolate around the world and this is used by chefs and by chocolate and confectionery manufacturers to make chocolates and desserts.

"Callebaut have been making chocolate for 150 years and they are the world's leading manufacturer of high-quality chocolate. Everyone from Godiva, the exclusive Belgian chocolatier, to Cadbury uses Callebaut chocolate," Clark said.

The story of chocolate goes back over 2000 years, when the Mayans and Aztecs of Central and South America used ground cacao seeds to make a spicy, foamy drink. In about 1521 the Spanish conquistadors brought the seeds home to Spain but kept cocoa a closely guarded secret for almost 100 years. Eventually the drink's popularity spread throughout Europe, but it remained an elite and expensive drink.





When the Industrial Revolution ushered in the steam engine, it became possible to grind cacao and mass-produce chocolate cheaply and quickly. Technology and innovation have changed the texture and taste of chocolate, but 'real chocolate' is still highly sought after and more expensive to produce.

Real chocolate is made from cocoa and its ingredients include cocoa butter. Compound chocolate is made with vegetable oils and doesn't have the same fine qualities as real chocolate.

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"It is fascinating to see Callebaut's operation. Sometimes chocolate is shipped in solid form and sometimes it is shipped as liquid in big tanks and it is pumped out at its destination. Watching this being done felt a bit like being in the movie *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*," Clark said.

He relishes the thought of a rematch in the future and is already working on ideas: "I hope this is the first competition of many for me. I would really love to represent Australia again."

Back at Crown Towers, Clark heads up a team of 23 pastry and bakery staff and he confesses it is hard to get and keep good pastry chefs in Australia, as most want to head overseas for experience.

"Of course, Crown never sleeps, so we are constantly on the go. We are just ramping up for Christmas, which is our busiest time of the year," Clark said. His secret to keeping Crown's customers happy – "Well, we use about 100 kilograms of quality couverture chocolate a week." ■

Australia's Chocolate Master 2005 Tim Clark would not single out any of Melbourne's chocolatiers as his favourite. However, Melbourne's chocoholics are fortunate in having world-class delights to sample. Here are some places to indulge at.

#### CACAO FINE CHOCOLATES & PATISSERIE

Exquisite handmade chocolates – some would say the best in town and hot chocolate made with the best Belgian chocolate. 52 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda, (03) 8598 9555.

#### KOKO BLACK

Licensed chocolate lounge with a delectable selection of handmade chocolates. Some of the best hot chocolate in Melbourne, and a simply delicious chocolate dessert platter. Melbourne: Shop 4, Royal Arcade, (03) 9639 8911; Carlton: 167 Lygon Street, (03) 9349 2775.

#### MAX BRENNER

Chocolate from the bald man. You haven't lived until you've tasted a siacoo. Chocolate-coated waffles, handmade chocolates, gift boxes. Melbourne: Urban Market, QV, (03) 9663 6000; Shop OE 4 and 5, Melbourne Central, (03) 9662 4442.

#### HAIENDORF FINE CHOCOLATES

Handmade chocolates in the German tradition. Caulfield South: 884 Glenhuntly Road, (03) 9523 7799; Elwood: 79 Brighton Road, (03) 9525 6639; North Balwyn: 149 Bulleen Road, (03) 9857 0441; Surrey Hills: 1069 Riversdale Road, (03) 9808 0299.

#### HAIGH'S

Australia's oldest chocolate company. Free tastings. Melbourne: Block Arcade, phone (03) 9654 7673; 26 Collins Street, (03) 9650 2114; 191 Swanston Walk, (03) 9662 2262; Toorak: 501 Toorak Road, (03) 9827 8713; Hawthorn: 715 Glenferrie Road, (03) 9819 5000.

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#### CHOCOHOLIC TOURS

Visit chocolate and dessert makers about town. Discover hidden chocolate specialists and exquisite ice-creams. For details phone (03) 9815 1228 or visit [www.chocoholictours.com.au](http://www.chocoholictours.com.au)